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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI-ERITREA: UNSC WANTS GOOD OFFICES MISSION

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: UNSC members backed the Secretary-General's proposal to renew his offer of a good offices mission in order to encourage a negotiated solution to the Djibouti-Eritrea border impasse. Many members joined the U.S. in criticizing Eritrean actions but all agreed on the need for dialogue and continued Security Council engagement. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) Africa I Division chief Joao Honwana told the Security Council on September 17 that the UN's fact finding mission to investigate border clashes between Djibouti and Eritrea was hampered by Eritrea's refusal to cooperate with the investigation or grant visas to the UN mission. In contrast, Honwana praised Djiboutian authorities for facilitating a site visit to the border region and granting meetings with a wide range of officials, including the president and prime minister.

¶3. (SBU) Despite Eritrea's obstruction, Honwana said the mission was able to make a number of key judgments. He confirmed that Djiboutian forces had complied with the Council's call, issued in a 12 June PRST, to withdraw its forces to their pre-conflict positions, while Eritrean forces had not. Honwana also reported high expectations in the region, and particularly in Djibouti, that the UN would take an active role in seeking a peaceful solution to the dispute. He concluded by recommending that the SC use "all means at its disposal" to persuade Eritrea to withdraw its forces and reiterating the recommendation that the Secretary-General renew his offer of a good offices mission to help defuse tension and initiate dialogue between the two sides.

SC members criticize "unacceptable" Eritrean behavior

¶4. (SBU) France spoke first, criticizing recent Eritrean statements on the border dispute as showing "no sign of open-mindedness" and reaffirming France's intention to work through bilateral security agreements to maintain Djibouti's defensive capabilities. France agreed with the proposal to pursue a good offices mission and advocated taking advantage of the Eritrean foreign minister's attendance at the UNGA to begin these efforts. Amb. DiCarlo spoke for the U.S., praising Djibouti's restraint and cooperation in response to the current crisis, regretting Eritrea's failure to engage and supporting the SYG's proposal for a good offices mission. The UK welcomed a good offices mission as well, stating that "Eritrea's behavior is unacceptable." Russia said it supported high-level international mediation in the conflict, and called on both parties, "particularly Eritrea," to withdraw forces and negotiate.

¶5. (SBU) South Africa regretted Eritrea's failure to cooperate and gave their support to a high-level political intervention, including a good offices mission by the SYG. Croatia criticized Eritrea's lack of cooperation and backed a good offices mission. Vietnam regretted Eritrea's refusal to engage and said that conflict resolution was impossible if

the parties involved did not show goodwill. Costa Rica supported the idea of a good offices mission and accused Eritrea of "defying" the international community. Should Eritrean obstinacy continue, Costa Rica said that the Council should consider further measures, such as referring the dispute to the International Court of Justice or inviting the Eritrean PermRep to an informal SC meeting in order to explain Eritrea's defiance. Panama said it was necessary to protect Djibouti, "the threatened party," and asked the EU, as the only international actor to have successfully engaged Asmara on this issue, to brief the Council on the outcome of its talks with Eritrea.

¶16. (SBU) China did not single out Eritrea for criticism, but proposed "enhanced communication" between the SC and the parties and urged both Eritrea and Djibouti to settle their differences through negotiation.

Libya, Italy, others link conflict to Ethiopia-Eritrea

¶17. (SBU) Libya regretted Eritrea's refusal to cooperate but said it considered the dispute with Djibouti a result of the SC's "procrastination" in dealing with the Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute. Italy likewise said that the Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute was the "main source of instability" in the region and that an integrated, consistent approach -- including demarcation of disputed borders -- was necessary in order to resolve outstanding issues. Italy supported a good offices mission and engagement during UNGA, and offered to put its historical and technical knowledge of regional conflicts at the Council's disposal. Belgium praised Djibouti for its

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restraint and regretted Eritrea's obstruction, but said that in their view resolution of the Djibouti-Eritrea dispute would likely be contingent on resolution of Eritrea's dispute with Ethiopia. Indonesia said that the Security Council needed to "address the underlying issue" of the Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute. Indonesia also urged the Council to consider referring the Ethiopia-Djibouti dispute to arbitration, claiming that Eritrea had respected the results of previous arbitration decision vis-a-vis Yemen and Ethiopia.

Khalilzad